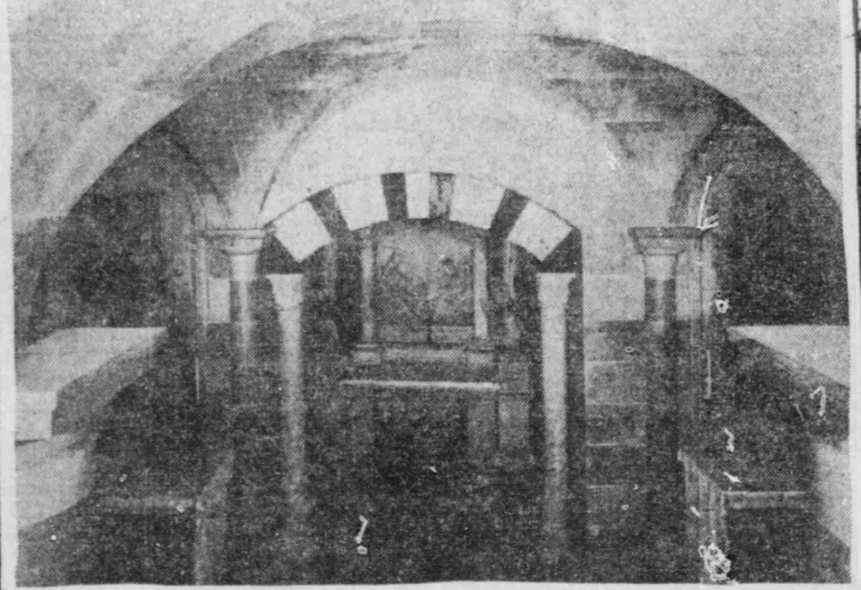


WASHINGTON, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21, 1902.

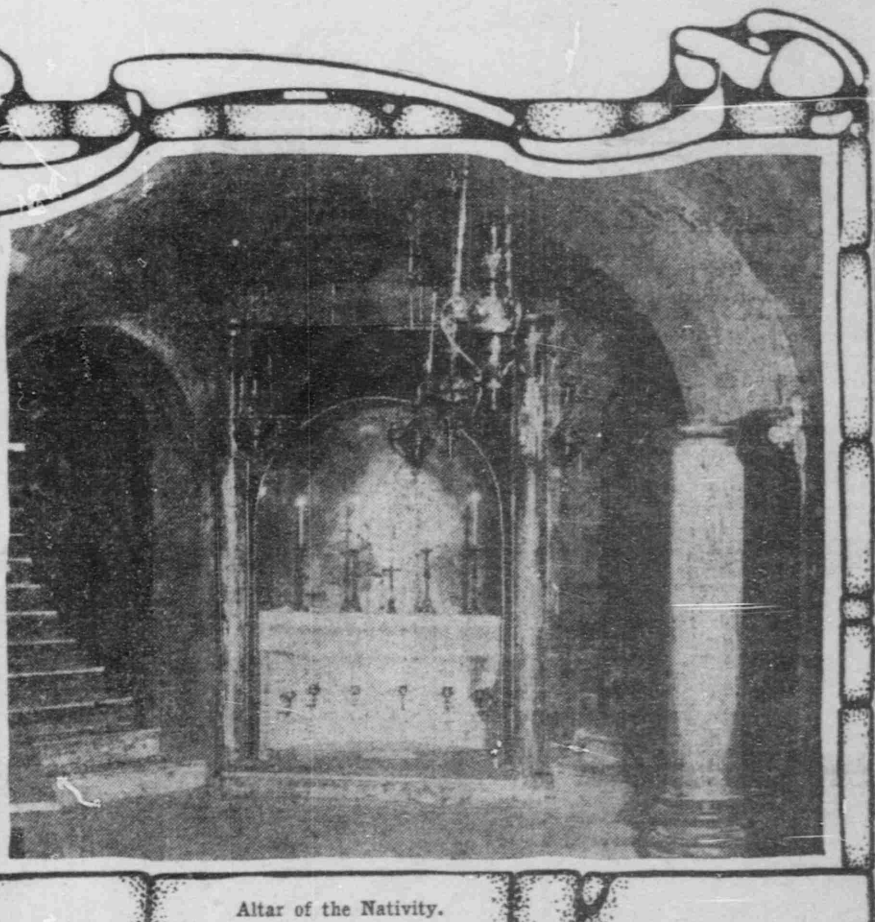
## Christmas in the Shelter of Mount St. Sepulchre



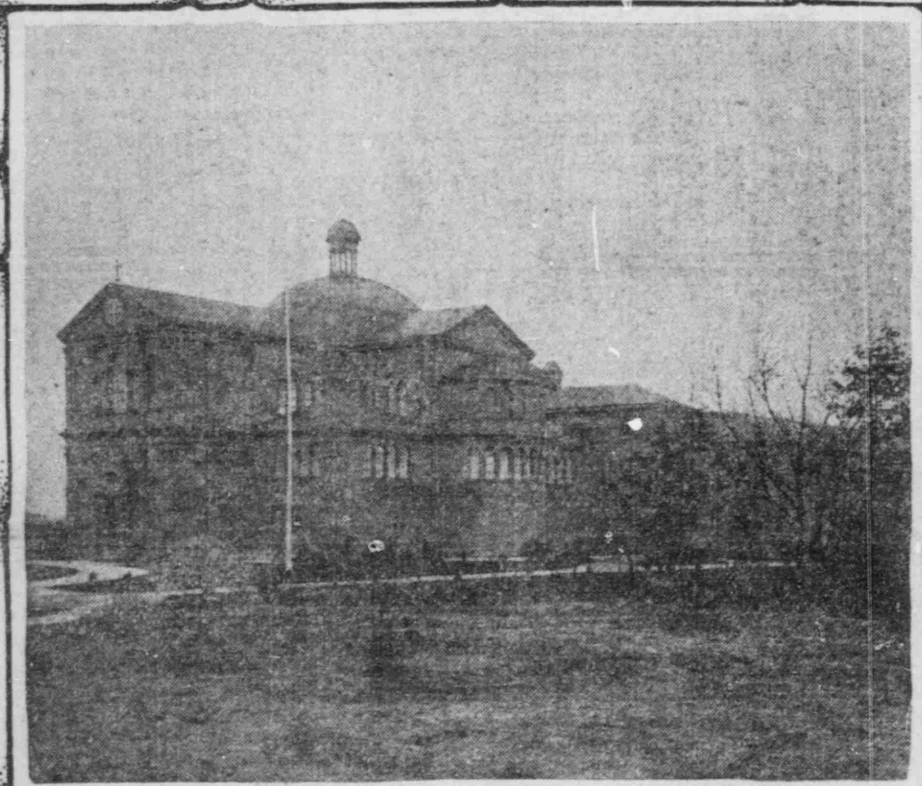
Annunciation Altar.



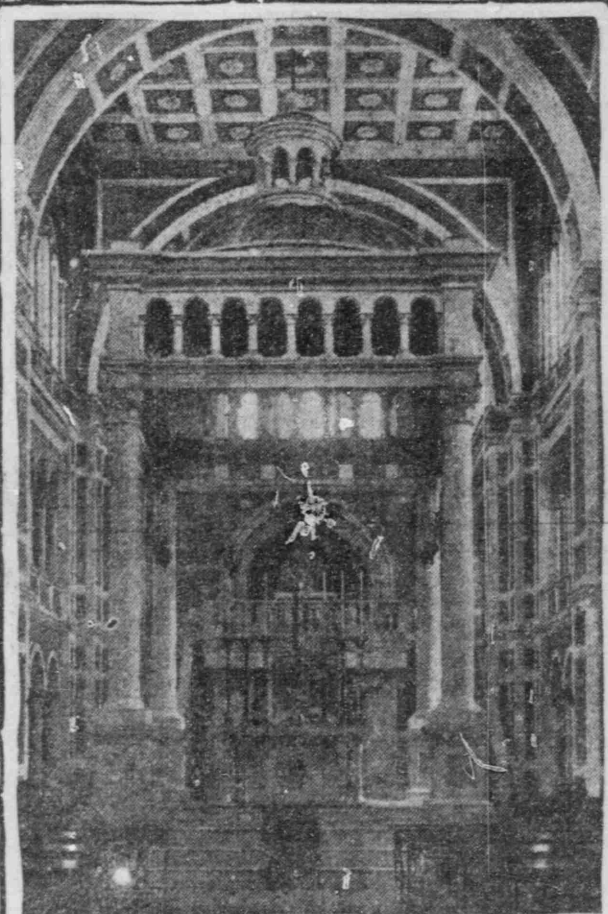
Altar of the Nativity.



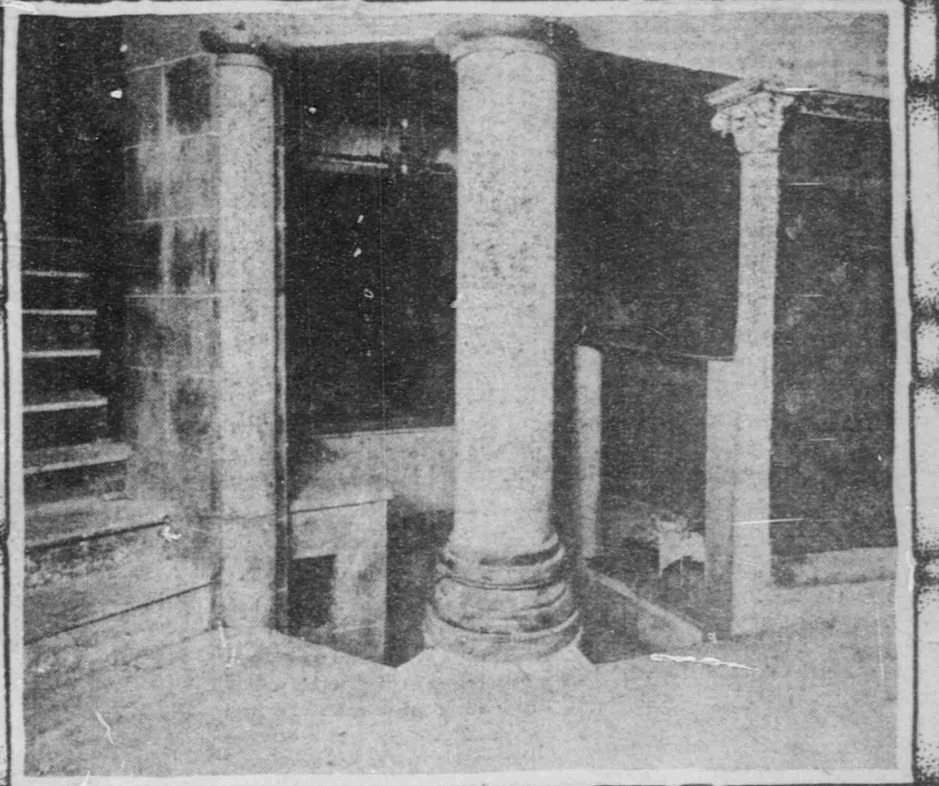
The Place of the Manger.



The Church and Monastery.



The High Altar



THE Christmas season, bringing its tidings of joy into the hearts of rich and poor alike, possesses a marvelous power. Before it walls of strongly cemented brick, structures of hewn stone, or weather-beaten, storm-stained wood, become as though they were not. The spirit of the season passes through them, one and all. It walks in mansions where ancient tapestries line its path on either hand, and the rarest of rugs from the looms of the mystic, spice-scented East feel the impress of its invisible feet; it breathes a warmth in the home of the laborer, and in even the solemn shadows of the cloister its laughter breaks the rule of silence and its merriment resounds in the habitation of prayer and meditation.

By a strange link, wrought in the wonderful smithy of chance and coincidence, a link extending far over seas and through a lapse of nineteen hundred years and more, Washington is bound to the scene of that first Christmas in Bethlehem of Judea. For in the Holy Night now drawing near, the ceremonies to be celebrated at the Church of the Nativity in the city "which is called the city of David" will find a reproduction in only one place in the world—the Franciscan Chapel of the Holy Land, at Mount St. Sepulchre, in Brookland. There, where a facsimile of the Grotto beneath the Basilica at Bethlehem exists, the services duplicating those at the original shrine will be held. They were instituted by the Very Rev. Godfrey Schilling, and have been held yearly, with the exception of last year, when, owing to certain unavoidable circumstances, it was found necessary to omit them.

## A Season of Great Joy.

Christmas, in the shelter of convent walls, is indeed a season of great joy. Its coming has been long looked forward to, and perhaps this expectancy has been heightened by the severe period of fasting which, in the Franciscan Order, precedes the Feast of the Nativity, for, after all, monks are human, even though they be Friars Minor.

From All Saints until Christmas Day, with the exceptions only of the intervening Sundays, strict fasting and abstinence has been observed. In the patois of the cloister it is what is called a "black fast." The name in itself is sufficiently suggestive.

The celebration of the day is not confined to those services and devotions in the church in which the public generally has a share. For a time the shackles of discipline and the strict rules of the convent are relaxed, and the community proceeds to enjoy itself in the manner ordained by tradition and sanctioned by decorum.

One who dwelt for a time in the beautiful structure crowning the hill called Mount St. Sepulchre—the cluster of buildings which is the life-dream of Father Godfrey, made manifest in enduring brick and stone and marble—may tell the story of Yuletide there better than an outsider who hears it inaccurately, and second-hand at best. The account here given has come from one who for a while was one of those living beneath the shelter of the monastery roof, in the calm and quiet of its silent cells and corridors.

## I.

THE preparations have been many and exacting, and above all thing, to say nothing of the annual preparing for the feast of the birth of the Christ-child, the saddened services of advent, typifying a world in the shadows of darkness, yet thrilling with the hope and expectancy of the Messiah's coming, the fasting and prayers, there are many other things that must be looked after. Matins will be sung solemnly between the hours of 11

and 12 o'clock on Christmas Eve, ending just in time for the solemn high mass, which will begin at midnight. For this office, as well as for the mass itself, there has been much rehearsing of music.

True, only the Gregorian chant is used, and plain song sounds simple when it is heard. It is not easy, though, as any one will find who tries to school twenty or thirty untrained or partially trained voices into the mysteries of its rhythms and cadences. Whoever knows music understands this. To those who do not, it

merely suffices to say that Gregorian can only be very good or very bad. There is no middle course. It must be exact or else it is wretched.

There are other songs to be rehearsed, too, and besides these the younger students have been, with a great air of mystery, learning speeches and a dramatized allegory, with which to surprise and entertain later. And as our amusements are not many, we do not seek to know too much regarding these secret preparations. It is better to be surprised.

The learning of songs is not the end. Altars must be decorated; the grotto of Bethlehem made ready; the church beautified for the occasion. Some of the brothers go out on the farm and fell cedars, tall, stately evergreens so appropriate to the season, or to the nearest woodlands in search of berry-laden holly branches. The fairest blossoms the extensive green houses can afford, hurried to midwinter maturity under the fostering care of Brother Egidius—who has seen Christmas in the Holy Land—have been gathered to be used in enriching the high altar, the altar of the nativity, the altar of the Magi and the Place of the Manger.

## Much to Be Done.

Much else has been done. The students have had to finish their examinations, and the clerics theirs. In the kitchen, even amidst the serving of a diet truly Lenten in character, there has been the cooking of dainties for the morrow, and Brother Christopher, who rules the domain of the bakehouse, has made his ovens fragrant with the spices of cakes and cookies and the "fruit loaves" of the Waterland.

Busy also has been the brother who is sacristan. He has been polishing up his finest candelabra, such as are kept in reserve for great occasions. He prides himself on the manner in which he arranges his altar lights, and his decorative scheme has been a matter of long study.

It is early Christmas Eve. Confessions have been heard, and the dimly lit corridors are silent; it is scarce 8 o'clock, yet not even the clatter of a

sandal is heard along the flooring of cement. The night will be a long one, and it is better to get a little rest. We will need it.

## II.

A FEW minutes before eleven the clanging of a handbell awakens us. Ding! dong! It resounds as in the hands of a brother it passes the rows of cells. We rise sleepily and go to the refectory, where there are steaming pots of chocolate and plates piled high with crisp, tasty zwiback. We munch and drink, with hearty enough appetites, yet in haste, for the time is brief.

Now the chimes ring out, clanging sharply in the wintry night. We must hurry. It is time the procession was formed.

## Robing for the Celebration.

The sacristy is quickly thronged. Students, who are members of the third order, and wear the habit on state occasions only, are robing; the celebrant and his assistants, the deacon and the subdeacon, are vesting for matins, and the minor officers at the altar are slipping on their surplices. The crucifer stands with the cross, ready to head the procession. In one corner the thurifer is swinging the censers to and fro to coax the newly ignited charcoal into a glow.

Now the organ's tones are heard, echoing and re-echoing among the beautiful arches copied from the church of the Holy Wisdom—Santa Sofia—in Constantinople. It is time. The procession enters the church.

There are benches about the altar for the community. Standing with beaded heads, the introductory prayers are said—"Our Father," "Hail Mary," and the Creed—then the celebrant intones, "Gloria voce," according to the rubrics: "Domine labia mea aperies"—O Lord, open my lips.

And the reply is taken up by the choir in a mighty chorus: "Et os meum annuntiabit laudam

tuam"—And my mouth shall show forth Thy praise.

Thus the office of matins proceeds with its psalms, canticles, and versicles; with its prayers and lessons, the prophecies of Isaiah, the sermon of St. Leo on the Nativity, the homilies of St. Gregory, of St. Ambrose, and of St. Augustine. The "Te Deum" is chanted, the orations completed; it is midnight.

Merrily the chimes ring now. Two candles sufficed for the matins, but soon the altar becomes a bower of lights and flowers. The tapers on the other altars are kindled and the church, which has been steadily filling, is crowded. At the epistle side of the altar the celebrant is laying aside his cope and putting on the chasuble, and the deacons vest themselves in their dalmatics. They go to the altar; they bow. The mass has begun.

At the "Gloria in Excelsis" the chimes are heard again, clanging madly as though in an ecstasy of joy. Little bells of silver, taken from side altars, tinkle in response until the chant is completed.

## The "Adeste Fidelis."

At the offertory—and it could not be otherwise—is sung the "Adeste Fidelis." This year since this was in the missal. It is one of the old sequences which has long since lost its official character. Yet a Christmas without the song whose very tune is redolent of the season! Surely, it would be next door to a heresy. The smell of incense fills the air. The sacring bells tinkle; the chains of swinging censers clink. The solemn ceremony goes on, step by step, to its close. Now the benediction is given, the priests leave the altar.

But all is not over yet. Candles are brought in and distributed to everyone, brothers and laity. The celebrant, priest, who is Father Godfrey, exchanges the chasuble for the cope, and a procession is formed, two by two, headed by the cross bearer and his attending acolytes. At the rear is the celebrant, with deacon and subdeacon on either

hand. The thurifer, with a censer, walks before the trio of priests.

In his arms the celebrant bears a pillow of satin, rich with lace and ribbons, in the midst of which reposes a smiling wax image of the Infant Saviour. Slowly the procession moves around the church to the entrance of the Bethlehem Grotto, and down the stairways that lead to the crypt.

This place reproduces, in all save the richness of the surroundings and the vast multitude of votive lamps and heavy tapestries, the Grotto at Bethlehem as it appears at this day. At one end, between the two spiral stairways, is the place of the Nativity, marked by a silver star, with the Latin words: "Hic de Virgine Maria Jesus Christus natus est." ("Here Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary.")

To one side, at the right hand, and down two steps, is a rock-hewn manger, where the Child was placed. Opposite it, scarce a pace away, is the altar of the Wise Men, the Magi who saw, knew, and followed the Star of Bethlehem. Paintings, hung tapestry-wise, commemorate the event.

## In the Grotto.

The procession has descended, and the grotto is filled. The officiating priest, with the waxen figure of the Babe in his arms, faces the altar of the Nativity; the deacon incenses the Book of the Gospels, and begins to intone the gospel of the first mass of Christmas, which is said in the night. This gospel is taken from the second chapter of St. Luke, and starts:

"Exiit edictum a Cesare Augusto, ut describeretur universus orbis."—"There went forth a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed."

At the words "and she brought forth her first-born son" the pillow and the Infant are laid on the silver star. The deacon continues, "and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes"—here the figure is taken up by the celebrant—"and laid Him in a manger." The image of the Child is placed on the straw of the crib, and the story of His birth is sung to its completion.

Each act has been done as in Bethlehem, with but a slight difference—the difference of a word. There, at the actual place of the Nativity, the words of the gospel are changed; they read,

"And here she brought forth"—"and here laid Him in a manger."

Once more the "Gloria in Excelsis" is sung. The air in the crowded crypt, warmed by the flames of the candles held in the hand of every worshiper, grows hot and oppressive. The fumes of incense form a redolent cloud above our heads.

Prayers are recited, Christmas songs sung in German and English. Again the procession forms and returns to the church above.

## More Masses.

The cross-bearer leads direct to the sacristy. There are two more masses yet to be said by the celebrant—for every priest celebrates thrice on this one day of the year. Attended by a server, he goes back to the Bethlehem crypt, and some lingerers in the church and many of the community follow. Some are more wearied, and retire at once. There is no need to wait; the community received holy communion at the high mass.

In the sacristy "Merry Christmas" is exchanged, greetings are showered everywhere, and hands are shaken. Then come half-sleepy good-nights, and we realize what a splendid thing is, lumber, after all.

## III.

CHRISTMAS MORNING! It is still dark and a winter blast rattles the window frames. The day begins much as usual. Lauds are said in choir, with a low mass at 6 o'clock. We breakfast at 7. The fare is the usual; this at this meal—coffee and bread, and, as it is a feast day, there is butter, too.

Masses are going on all the morning, and at 9 comes the second high celebration. When it ends the recreation rooms are sought, or a few minutes' rest is taken—for the "little hours" must be said in choir between 11 o'clock and noon.

The community is "free" today, and there are many visitors—professors from the Catholic University, benefactors of the monastery, and other male friends. There is no restriction on conversation, and laughter holds the keys of the house.

Noon finds the community at table in the refectory. All are there. Even the

(Continued on Second Page.)